**Lateral thinking** is all about approaching problems in a creative and indirect way, using reasoning that’s not immediately obvious. Here are a few **classic lateral thinking puzzles** you can use with your students to get them thinking outside the box!

**1. The Man in the Elevator**

**Puzzle:**
A man lives on the 10th floor of an apartment building. Every day, he takes the elevator to the ground floor to go to work. When he returns home, he rides the elevator only to the 7th floor, then he walks up the remaining three flights of stairs to the 10th floor. Why does he do this?

**Answer:**
The man is short. He can’t reach the button for the 10th floor, but he can reach the button for the 7th floor, so he rides to the 7th floor and walks the rest of the way up.

**2. The Deadly Dinner**

**Puzzle:**
A man was found dead in a restaurant. There were 34 other people in the restaurant who had eaten the same food, but only the man died. What happened?

**Answer:**
The man had a **peanut allergy**. He was the only one who had a dish containing peanuts, while everyone else had different food that didn’t contain peanuts.

**3. The Lightbulb Puzzle**

**Puzzle:**
You are in a completely dark room with three light switches outside it. One of the switches controls a light bulb inside the room, while the other two do nothing. You may flip the switches as many times as you like, but you can only go into the room **once**. How do you figure out which switch controls the bulb?

**Answer:**

1. Flip one switch on and leave it on for a few minutes.
2. Turn that switch off, then flip a different switch on.
3. Enter the room. The light bulb that is on is controlled by the second switch (the one you just turned on). The bulb that is off but warm is controlled by the first switch (the one you left on for a while and then turned off). The bulb that is off and cold is controlled by the third switch (the one you never touched).

**4. The Two Doors Puzzle**

**Puzzle:**
You’re in a room with two doors. One leads to freedom, the other leads to certain death. There are two guards: one always tells the truth, and the other always lies. You don’t know which guard is which. You can ask only **one question** to one of the guards to determine which door leads to freedom. What question do you ask?

**Answer:**
Ask either guard, “If I were to ask the other guard which door leads to freedom, which door would they point to?”

* If you ask the truthful guard, they’ll tell you the door the liar would point to (which will be the wrong door).
* If you ask the liar, they’ll lie about which door the truthful guard would point to (again, giving you the wrong door). So, in both cases, the door they point to will be the wrong one. You should choose the **opposite door**.

**5. The Man with the Two Coins**

**Puzzle:**
A man has two coins that add up to 30 cents. One of the coins is not a nickel. What are the two coins?

**Answer:**
One of the coins is a **quarter** (25 cents), and the other is a **nickel** (5 cents). The phrase "one of the coins is not a nickel" is true because the quarter is not a nickel, but the other coin is a nickel.

**6. The String and the Box**

**Puzzle:**
You are given a **box** and a **piece of string**. Your task is to measure 4 feet of string, but you don't have a ruler. How do you do it?

**Answer:**
Wrap the string around the outside of the box, and then count how many wraps it takes to make 4 feet. The box’s dimensions (if known) can be used to calculate how much length you’d get by wrapping the string around it.

**7. The Two Sons Puzzle**

**Puzzle:**
A father has two sons. One son says, “My brother is 5 years older than me.” The other son says, “I am 10 years older than my brother.” How old are the sons?

**Answer:**
The puzzle’s trick is in understanding that both statements are true when the sons are **twins**. The first statement is the son saying he is 5 years older than his brother, and the second statement comes from the second twin, who says he is 10 years older. Both statements are **simultaneously true** because they are twins with **different ways of measuring age**!

**8. The Paradox of the Barber**

**Puzzle:**
In a town, there is a barber who shaves all the men who do not shave themselves, and only those men. The question is: Who shaves the barber?

**Answer:**
This is a **paradox**. If the barber shaves himself, then according to the rule, he must not shave himself. But if he does not shave himself, then he must shave himself, according to the rule. This creates a **contradiction**, meaning the situation is impossible.

**9. The Water Jug Problem**

**Puzzle:**
You have a **5-liter jug** and a **3-liter jug**, and you need to measure exactly 4 liters of water. How do you do it?

**Answer:**

1. Fill the 5-liter jug completely.
2. Pour water from the 5-liter jug into the 3-liter jug until it is full, leaving 2 liters in the 5-liter jug.
3. Empty the 3-liter jug.
4. Pour the remaining 2 liters from the 5-liter jug into the 3-liter jug.
5. Fill the 5-liter jug again.
6. Pour water from the 5-liter jug into the 3-liter jug (which already has 2 liters) until it is full. You will be left with exactly **4 liters** in the 5-liter jug.

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